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100-1-7-237

21 April 1948

TO: Assistant Director for Special Operations
FROM: Chief of Operations
SUBJECT: Order of 3 April on the Dissemination
of OSO Intelligence

The order of 3 April 1948 that all information that is received in OSO shall be disseminated to interested Departments of the Government has very serious implications for all aspects of the basic and standard policy of secret operations. I should like to bring these to your attention.

(1) Counter-intelligence: It is assumed that the provisions of this memorandum do not apply to CE information since OSO is the final repository of foreign CE information for the U.S. Government. A very considerable proportion of CE operations and the resultant intelligence is of such delicacy and is so presented that its automatic distribution would imperil CE operations.

(2) Revelation of Source: It is assumed that your memorandum does not apply to the categories which obviously must have specialized handling. These categories include material flowing from high diplomatic and government sources and from codes, ciphers, intercepts, penetrations, and defectors.

(3) Deception Material and False Confirmation: Our reports sometimes represent 1) deception material and 2) false confirmation. Both of these can more readily be detected by OSO H.Q. intelligence officers than by any other experts since OSO officers alone know the source and origin of OSO material. If we automatically disseminate deception material and false confirmation reports we will run the risk of circulating unsound material which might adversely affect the policies of the U.S. Government. It is not consistent with the service which our customers expect of us to present material which we consider deception and call upon them to accept or reject; it is OSO which is the best, and indeed the only authority in a position to capitalize on our intimate knowledge of the source.

(4) Theory of Operations: Automatic dissemination of all intelligence received from the field is in direct opposition to our approved policy of control and direction of field activities and the information derived therefrom by Headquarters in Washington. This is a sound policy because the individual field station does not have all

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information available in OSO Washington. If such complete information were at the command of a field station, the field station for that very reason would not transmit to Washington much information now transmitted, even despite the ever-present desire of a station to make a showing on a purely quantity basis. It would, in short, exercise the same discretion which Washington should exercise. It lacks this knowledge, yet the discretion is placed in the hands of the field station and not in Headquarters.

(5) Quality of Information: This is the crux of the problem. It should be recognized that a considerable proportion of our information is of low quality or overt material previously or currently appearing in the public press. The experience of our own past and that of other services in indiscriminate and total dissemination indicate the dangers inherent in such a policy: it exposes secret operations to the constant charge, by opponents of the organization and the irresponsible, of ineptitude and futility. No intelligence organization will gain an enviable reputation nor do its country a service when it disseminates a large bulk of incoherent and conflicting information of both high and low level. For example, last month only 915 out of 2,566 reports received, or 36 per cent, were distributed. It should not put out reports on a critical situation which on the one hand state there is a major crisis and on the other state there is absolutely none. Its service depends upon quality and discrimination in reports, not on a quantity completely without reference to any consideration of any standard.

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